DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 973 EA 022 647

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TITLE A Preliminary Investigation of Superintendents' Perceptions Regarding Recruitment and Selection of Principals.
PUB DATE Dec 90
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Qualifications; *Administrator Selection; Elementary Secondary Education; *Faculty Recruitment; Personnel Management; *Principals; *Superintendents

ABSTRACT

Current research suggests principal effectiveness is key to a successful instructional program. However, there is considerable lack of uniformity among superintendents regarding principal recruitment and selection. Of the 80 surveys mailed to a random sample of the nation's superintendents, 35 usable surveys rating the importance of 42 recruitment and selection procedures were completed and returned. Development of an accurate job description and professional references ranked the highest in their respective categories. A total of 6 factors were extracted from 22 selection tools. Three factors related to how well the candidate fits into the school system and community, two pertained to advanced academic training, and the last related to the candidate's personal background. An extensive description of methodology and tables of results are included. (EJS)

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A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PRINCIPALS

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Introduction

Current research suggests that the principal's leadership is one of the key determinants in the success of any school. Both the "effective schools" research of the 1970s (Austin, 1979; Edmunds, 1979) and "excellence movement" of the 1980s (Drake & Roe, 1986) have provided evidence that strong administrative leadership is an indispensable characteristic of effective schools.

Despite the critical importance of employing the most promising candidates as principals, there is ample evidence that many school districts lack established policies and procedures for systematic recruitment and selection of principals (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Goodlad (1984) summarized the situation when he wrote, "One need not look far to find that in many districts the selection and preparation of those selected for this important post is, to say the least, casual" (p. 306).

A variety of suggestions and recommendations have emerged regarding the training, recruitment, and selection of principals. The majority of these have focused on university pre-service training programs (Cornett, 1983), formation of a broader-based applicant pool (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Klauke, 1988), more objective screening of applicants (Sharpe, 1976; Fleigner, 1987), and employment of relevant selection criteria to distinguish among potential principalship candidates (Newberry, 1977; Wendel & Breed, 1988; Gottfredson & Hybl, 1989).

Purpose

This preliminary study was undertaken for several reasons. The first was to determine the relative importance that superintendents assigned to a variety of selected principal recruitment and selection practices. Secondly, this study

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attempted to uncover and identify common factors underlying the superintendents' responses to individual survey items. The final purpose of the study was to produce a more reliable instrument for use in a larger national study.

Methodology

A random sample of 80 names was selected from a list of 1,000 randomly selected public school superintendents supplied by Quality Educational Data of Denver, Colorado. This list represents a proportional sample, by state, of the nearly 16,000 superintendents currently serving in public school districts throughout the United States.

Data were gathered using a mailed researcher-developed survey instrument composed of 50 items. In addition to responding to eight demographic items, participants were requested to rate the importance of 10 principal recruitment/ screening practices and 32 selection criteria. All items, except demographic items, were rated using a Likert-type scale of "1" (not important at all) to "7" (extremely important).

The first stage of data analysis consisted of computing response frequencies for the demographic items, and means, standard deviations, and rankings for all of the non-demographic items. Computation of individual item-to-total correlations followed, and all items failing to correlate significantly ($p < .05$) with the total were eliminated from further analyses. All items correlating significantly with the total were subsequently subjected to a principal factor analysis, with the resulting factor matrix rotated orthogonally to produce the simplest and most logical factor solution. Factor loadings of ± 0.35 were considered significant.

Results

Of the 80 survey instruments mailed out, a total of 35 (43.8%) usable surveys were completed and returned. Table 1 (following page) summarizes response item means, standard deviations, and rankings.

Table 1

Summary of Means and Rankings for Importance of Recruitment/ Screening Practices and Selection Criteria

Item Number	Item Description	Item Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
	RECRUITMENT/SCREENING PRACTICES			
3	Job Description	5.86	1.15	1
1	Procedures	5.46	1.25	2
5	Recruit Statewide	5.34	1.45	3
2	Needs Assessment	4.83	1.32	4
7	University Placement	4.49	1.63	5.5
8	Screening Committee	4.49	1.70	5.5
6	Within System	4.43	1.74	7
10	Candidate Pool	2.89	1.79	8
4	Recruit Nationally	2.63	1.27	9
9	Outside Interviewer	1.91	1.18	10
	SELECTION CRITERIA			
28	Professional References	6.34	1.12	1
17	Standard Certificate	6.26	1.42	3
23	Teaching Experience	6.26	1.02	3
37	Compatible Goals	6.26	0.77	3
11	Masters Degree	6.14	1.29	5
36	Compatible Values	6.00	0.83	6
40	Physical Condition	5.54	1.02	7
29	Personal References	5.40	1.52	8.5
14	B.A. in Education	5.40	2.02	8.5
35	Compatible Philosophy	5.29	1.14	10
18	Advanced Certificate	5.00	1.80	11
19	Admin. Practicum	4.97	1.63	12
15	Masters in Teaching	4.89	1.41	13
26	Professional Membership	4.86	1.62	14
12	Ed. S. Degree	4.71	1.41	15
20	Similar Experience	4.69	1.39	16
33	Administrator Approval	4.54	1.54	17
34	Teacher Approval	4.49	1.52	18
42	Physical Appearance	4.43	1.55	19
22	AP Experience	4.40	1.31	20
16	High GPA	4.11	1.33	21
31	Familiarity with System	3.97	1.72	22
32	Community Approval	3.91	1.59	23
30	Presently Within System	3.71	1.60	24
13	Doctoral Degree	3.31	1.51	25
21	Dissimilar Experience	3.14	1.25	26
38	Candidate Age	2.94	1.47	27
27	Publication	2.57	1.38	28.5
25	Noneducational Exper.	2.57	1.32	28.5
24	Coaching Experience	2.23	1.27	30
39	Candidate Gender	2.00	1.33	31
41	Marital Status	1.91	1.20	32

It is apparent from Table 1 that superintendents perceived preparation of an accurate job description (mean=5.86), development of specific recruitment procedures (5.46), and recruiting on a statewide basis (5.34) the most important recruitment/screening practices. In contrast, employing an outside interviewer (1.91), recruiting on a national basis (2.63), and creating a candidate pool from which to draw (2.89) were considered least important by the responding superintendents.

Superintendents indicated that professional references (mean= 6.34) was the singular most important criterion upon which to select from among principalship candidates. Following closely in importance, and tied for third place with a mean response of 6.26, were possession of a standard administrative certificate, teaching experience, and compatibility of candidate's goals with those of the school system. Possession of a master's degree in administration (6.14) and compatibility of candidate's values with those of the community (6.00) were the remaining items receiving a mean rating of 6.00 or above.

At the other end of the scale, the candidate's marital status received the lowest mean rating (1.91). Following marital status as least important were candidate's gender (2.00), coaching experience (2.23), noneducational experience (2.57), and history of professional publication (2.57).

After eliminating all individual response items which failed to correlate with the total instrument, the remaining 25 items were subjected to a principal factor analysis. A total of six common factors were extracted. Orthogonal rotation (Varimax method) of the resulting factor matrix produced the most satisfactory solution in terms of simple structure and logical grouping of items into common factors. Table 2 (following page) presents the rotated factor pattern, including eigenvalues (latent roots) for each of the factors and final communalities for each of the items. Only three of the 25 items failed to load significantly on any of the six factors.

Table 2

Rotated Factor Pattern for Items Loading Greater Than .35 (N=35)

Item Description	Factors I	II	III	IV	V	VI	Final Communalities
Presently Within System	.888	*	*	*	*	*	.831
Recruit Within System	.873	*	*	*	*	*	.779
Familiarity With System	.613	*	*	*	*	*	.645
Candidate Pool	.563	*	*	*	*	*	.525
Community Approval	.520	.462	*	*	*	*	.625
Teacher Approval	*	.723	*	*	*	*	.551
Administrator Approval	*	.690	*	*	*	*	.614
Masters in Teaching	*	.636	*	*	*	*	.508
Noneducational Experience	*	.545	*	*	*	*	.450
Professional Membership	*	.540	*	*	*	*	.456
Advanced Certificate	*	*	.814	*	*	*	.701
Administrative Practicum	*	*	.725	*	*	*	.597
Ed.S. Degree	*	*	.610	.509	*	*	.661
Publications	*	*	.495	*	*	*	.413
Recruit Nationally	*	*	*	.648	*	*	.509
Doctoral Degree	*	*	*	.594	*	*	.460
Dissimilar Experience	*	*	*	.452	*	*	.351
Compatible Goals	*	*	*	*	.778	*	.740
Compatible Values	*	*	*	*	.694	*	.696
Job Description	*	*	*	*	*	.662	.565
High Graduate GPA	*	*	*	*	*	.621	.533
Physical Appearance	*	*	*	*	*	.450	.485
Eigenvalues:	**3.017**	**2.800**	**2.468**	**1.946**	**1.920**	**1.594**	

When combined, the six factors account for 57.3% of the total variance attributable to the 22 response items. Based upon the highest-loading items on each factor, tentative identifications of each factor are as follows:

Factor I: Local Standing of Candidate

Factor II: Local Approval of Candidate

Factor III: Advanced Preparation of Candidate

Factor IV: Advanced Degree Held by Candidate

Factor V: Local Compatibility of Candidate

Factor VI: Miscellaneous

Table 3 (following page) presents means, percent of total variance, and reliability coefficients for each of the six factors.

Table 3

Descriptive Data and Reliability Coefficients for the Extracted Common Factors

Factor Number	No. of Items	Overall Mean	Percent of Total Variance	Reliability Coefficient
I	5	3.783	12.6	.849
II	6	4.210	11.7	.812
III	4	4.314	10.3	.777
IV	4	3.450	8.1	.671
V	2	6.129	8.0	.835
VI	3	4.800	6.6	.642
TOTAL	**22***	**4.239**	**57.3**	**.855**

* total number of items is less than additive due to two items loading on each of two factors

On the average, the selection criteria composing Factor V (Local Compatibility of Candidate; mean=6.129) were considered more important than those loading on any other factor. In contrast, the criteria composing Factor IV (Advanced Degree Held by Candidate; mean=3.450) were considered least important.

Discussion

Perhaps the most interesting finding regarding recruitment/screening practices is the very low ratings given to recruit on a national basis (mean=2.63) and forming a pool of potential candidates (2.89). Both of these practices have been strongly recommended as a means to broaden the base from which to recruit and select potential principalship candidates (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Goodlad, 1984). Respondents in the present study appear to feel that recruitment of candidates "close to home" would produce enough qualified candidates from whom to select.

The high ratings given standard administrative certification (6.26), teaching experience (6.26), and possession of a master's degree (6.14) are not too surprising considering that these criteria are minimum requirements for the principalship in almost every state (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). However, superintendents did not attach much importance to professional training beyond the minimum state requirements as evidenced by their moderate ratings for possession of an advanced administrative certificate (5.00), Ed.S. degree (4.71), and doctoral degree (3.31).

Another noteworthy result to emerge from this study is that superintendents considered teaching experience much more important than administrative experience. While teaching experience was ranked as the third most important criterion (mean=6.26), similar principalship experience (4.69) was ranked only 16th and assistant principalship experience (4.40) was ranked only 20th.

The importance of a candidate's "fit" in the local community (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983) was also substantiated by the study participants. All three items relating to local fit (i.e., compatible goals, compatible values, and compatible philosophy) were ranked within the upper 10 selection criteria.

When examining the specific factor structure to emerge from the present study, several tendencies become apparent. First, superintendents placed a higher degree of importance on a candidate's compatibility with the local system than on any other factor (indicated by the high mean, 6.129, for Factor V). The fact that local compatibility was considered so much more important than advanced preparation or degrees has serious implications for university administrator training programs and curricula. Those programs which do not address the issue of local compatibility are producing graduates who may be lacking an essential component of their training (regardless of other preparation or degrees earned through the program). Perhaps the most relevant question to be answered is whether or not a graduate administrative program can prepare students to be "compatible" with a given local school system and, if so, how? Perhaps more information regarding what makes an individual compatible with a school system needs to be discovered before this important question can be addressed.

Another related finding of interest is the low rating given advanced degree (mean = 3.450). The apparent lack of importance which superintendents place on formal graduate education also has implications for administrator training institutions. The relatively greater emphasis placed on advanced preparation (i.e., administrative practica and advanced certification) should

suggest the inclusion or increased emphasis in any graduate program of "hands-on" experience. Perhaps a restructuring of administrative curricula to emphasize practice over theory should be closely examined.

A more general examination of the final factor pattern suggests that "local fit" plays an important role in superintendents' consideration of principalship candidates. To some degree, all of the items in Factors I, II, and V are related to the superintendent's perception of how well the candidate will be accepted by, and function within the local system. This finding further supports the views held by Baltzell and Dentler (1983) which were mentioned previously in this paper.

The overall importance of "local fit" has several interpretations. The most obvious is that a principal must be knowledgeable of, and accepted by the constituents of a local system to function effectively. An alternative possibility, however, is that there may be a strong political component to hiring practices among public school superintendents. Selecting a candidate who "fits in," regardless of their academic background and professional abilities, suggests that "who you are" may be more important than "how well you perform." This political aspect of selecting principals has been suggested by others (e.g. Baltzell & Dentler, 1983; Kahl, 1980), and definitely has implications for the whole process of recruiting and selecting the best available candidate for the job. More research involving the relative importance of the political component of recruiting and hiring principals needs to be done.

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